

Three Rivers District Council

# Full Council Report

8 July 2025

PART I

**LOCAL PLAN – Regulation 18 Consultation Newly Submitted Sites and New Policies  
(DoF)**

**1 Summary**

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' approval of the Local Plan Regulation 18 Part Five: Newly Submitted Sites and New Policies consultation document (Appendix 1) to be consulted on in July/August 2025.
- 1.2 Inclusion in the consultation does not commit the Council to including the sites at Regulation 19 publication of the Local Plan.
- 1.3 36 new sites were submitted as a result of the call for sites exercise undertaken in January/February. 34 were residential sites and 2 employment sites (one of which was the data centre). These sites have been assessed through the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) and are discussed later in the report. The SHELAA assessment forms can be viewed in Appendix 2.
- 1.4 **The Regulation 18 consultation will not be allocating sites, rather it is seeking views on the potential sites.**

**2 Background**

- 2.1 The Council undertook a call for sites exercise in January/February 2025. The 36 sites submitted through this process were reported to Members at the March Local Plan Sub-Committee.
- 2.2 Following Counsel advice Members agreed to undertake a further round of Regulation 18 consultation at the May Local Plan Sub-Committee. The sites for consultation were considered at the 10 June Local Plan Sub-Committee. The consultation document will then be ratified at Full Council on 8 July.
- 2.3 It was agreed that the Regulation 18 document would include newly submitted sites and new policies that hadn't previously been consulted on. The new policies include net zero policies, the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC policy, the Northwood Headquarters MOD policy, and the new standalone biodiversity policy. These policies have previously been agreed by the Local Plan Sub-Committee with some changes made since which will be set out in this report.

**3 Sites**

- 3.1 The Regulation 18 consultation document does not set out which sites the Council considers should be included at Regulation 19 publication stage. The sites will need to be considered against sites that have previously been consulted on before those formal decisions can be made.
- 3.2 There is also additional evidence work that needs to be completed before these decisions can be made such as the Green Belt Review and Transport Assessment.

- 3.3 There is also site specific evidence that needs to be completed to further inform the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA). The SHELAA is an iterative process and information gleaned from this consultation can inform the SHELAA as we progress to Regulation 19 stage. Outstanding information includes Green Belt assessment, highways and access, flooding, landscape sensitivity and heritage impact.
- 3.4 As there is outstanding information in our site assessments no decisions have been made on the sites' suitability for development. Officers have categorised the sites into three categories: 'potentially suitable', 'some concerns' and 'significant concerns'.
- 3.5 As we complete evidence work and consider responses to this consultation sites will then be more clearly classified as being suitable or not and this will be used to inform decisions on the sites the Council is proposing for allocation in the Local Plan.
- 3.6 A key piece of outstanding evidence is the Green Belt Assessment currently being undertaken by the Council. As such, it has only been noted where sites are located within the Green Belt. Decisions regarding the impact on Green Belt will be informed by the Green Belt Assessment at Regulation 19 stage.
- 3.7 Site NCFS5 Land off Bedmond Road (a previously withdrawn housing site) was submitted for use as a data centre. This was before the Secretary of State had made their decision on the appeal on the refused planning application. As the Secretary of State decided to approve planning permission, this site is not being proposed to be consulted on as a site allocation. This is because it is already coming forwards and therefore does not need to be allocated.
- 3.8 Site NCFS33 was promoted by the leaseholder, however the landowner (TRDC) has no intention of bringing this site forwards. It is therefore considered unavailable for development. As such, this site will not be included in the consultation.

#### Sustainability Appraisal

- 3.9 The environmental, economic and social credentials of the development options and policies in the emerging Local Plan have been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which is undertaken at various stages of the Local Plan process. The SA plays an important role in demonstrating that the Local Plan reflects sustainability objectives and has considered all reasonable alternatives. It incorporates the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.
- 3.10 As previously reported to the Local Plan Sub Committee there is a legal requirement for the Council to consider the Sustainability Appraisal when making decisions on both policies and sites to be allocated for development. Although there are no decisions being made on sites as such at this stage, a SA briefing note has been prepared to support this consultation. This can be viewed in appendix 3.

#### Access to Services

- 3.11 Each of the newly submitted sites has been individually assessed in terms of its accessibility to services. This has been achieved through an approximate distance measurement between potential housing sites and the location of the service. The distance measurement is taken from the centre point of the site,

assumes a flat terrain and direct route as a result of the difficulty in mapping these aspects. It is recognised that in reality this may not be the case and further work will be undertaken in terms of access to services and fed back into the Regulation 19 stage of the plan-making process.

- 3.12 In order to determine levels of access to services, the following distance thresholds<sup>1</sup> have been used between housing and services, under which the service may be considered accessible.

- 3.13 **Table 1: Accessibility ideal standards:**<sup>2</sup>

Service	Distance Threshold
Stations	800m – 1600m
Primary Schools	400m - 800m
Secondary Schools	1600m - 3200m
GP Surgeries	800m – 1600m
Convenience shops	800m - 1600m
Open Spaces	400m – 800m
Convenience shops	800m – 1600m
Open Spaces	400m – 800m

- 3.14 Details of the distances and/or thresholds to existing services, have been provided in the site summaries.
- 3.15 In the consideration of sites, Members should take account of the infrastructure and services that are proposed to be provided on site as well as the accessibility to existing services.<sup>3</sup>

#### Initial Site Assessments

- 3.16 The SHELAA assessments for the sites are contained in the appendices to this report (Appendix 2). The previous Green Belt Reviews, SHELAA methodology and other evidence base studies were published alongside the previous Regulation 18 consultations and are available to view on the Council's website at:

<https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/services/planning/planning-policy/new-local-plan#Evidence%20base>

- 3.17 Table 2 below sets out all the sites that were submitted through the call for sites earlier this year. This includes the initial classification based on the information we have at this stage. These sites are all set out in the Regulation 18 consultation document (Appendix 1) as no decision is being made at this stage

<sup>1</sup> As was the case for the 2021 and 2023 Regulation 18 consultations, the distance thresholds are based on Three Rivers Access to Services Study 2007, Barton, H. et al (1995), Sustainable Settlements: a guide for planners, designers and developers, UWE, Bristol and DETR (2001) PPG13: Transport, HMSO, London

<sup>2</sup> Important facilities to which people can usually be expected to walk to should be a maximum of 400m away. Local facilities which are ideally accessible by foot should be a maximum of 800m away.

Local facilities to which it is not reasonable to expect all people to walk to, but which could be walked to by those who choose should be a maximum of 1600m away. Facilities which are less local but should be within cycling distance should preferably be within 5000m, and no more than 8000m away.

<sup>3</sup> A site that is outside the accessibility thresholds of an existing service/facility may be capable of providing that service/facility on site.

on whether these sites will come forwards or not. We are asking on views on these sites that will help inform future decisions.

**Table 2: Sites submitted through call for sites**

Site Ref.	Site Name	Initial Classification	Dwellings
NCFS1	Chequers House, Chequers Lane	Significant concerns	147
NCFS2	Fortune Farm, High Elms Lane	Significant concerns	142
NCFS3	The Old Dairy, Chequers Lane	Significant concerns	35
NCFS4	High Elms Manor	Significant concerns	35
NCFS5	Land off Bedmond Road (Data Centre)	N/A – existing planning permission	N/A
NCFS6	Land to the east of Watford Road	Some concerns	333
NCFS7	HCC Waterdell, Bricket Wood	Significant concerns	63
NCFS8	Land off St Albans Lane, Bedmond	Significant concerns	56
NCFS9	Land to the north-west of Woodstock, Bedmond	Significant concerns	20
NCFS10	Great Westwood	Significant concerns	455
NCFS11	Grange Wood, Carpenders Park	Potentially suitable	49
NCFS12	Land East of Oxhey Lane, Carpenders Park	Some concerns	381
NCFS13	Catlips Farm	Significant concerns	440
NCFS14	Land at Homefield Road, Chorleywood	Significant concerns	10
NCFS15	HCC Chorleywood Library	Potentially suitable	5
NCFS16	Land at Stag Lane	Significant concerns	23
NCFS17	North Hill Farm	Some concerns	57
NCFS18	Land to the East of Sarratt Lane	Significant concerns	32
NCFS19	Land adjacent to 60 Harthall Lane	Significant concerns	35
NCFS20	Lonsdale, Hyde Lane	Some concerns	10
NCFS21	Land south of Scots Hill	Potentially suitable	30
NCFS22	Nine of Herts Golf Club and surrounding land	Significant concerns	980
NCFS23	Primrose Lodge, London Road	Significant concerns	27
NCFS24	The Island, Rickmansworth	Significant concerns	16
NCFS25	The Vicarage, Rickmansworth	Significant concerns	9
NCFS26	HCC Meresworth, Rickmansworth	Potentially suitable	12
NCFS27	Green End Farm, Sarratt	Some concerns	39
NCFS28	Ravenswood, Sarratt	Some concerns	18
NCFS29	New Model Farm, Sarratt	Significant concerns	110
NCFS30	Sarratt Lodge, Sarratt Green	Significant concerns	8

NCFS31	Land to the South-East of Poles Hill	Significant concerns	102
NCFS32	Land to the southwest of Bragmans Lane	Significant concerns	122
NCFS33	Oxhey Park Golf Centre, Prestwick Road	Unavailable	200
NCFS34	HCC Pinewood Lodge, South Oxhey	Potentially suitable	18
NCFS35	Land south of Chalfont Lane (Employment)	Significant concerns	N/A
NCFS36	Land North of Little Green Lane	Significant concerns	35

### Timeline

3.18 The timeline for the consultation is as follows:

23 June – P&R to agree Regulation 18 document

8 July – Full Council to ratify Regulation 18 document

14 July to 24 August (provisional) – Undertake Regulation 18 consultation

## **4 Policies**

4.1 The Regulation 18 consultation document includes 8 policies that have not previously been consulted on. These cover biodiversity, the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Northwood Headquarters MOD site and five net zero policies.

4.2 These policies have all been previously reported to the Local Plan Sub-Committee and agreed to progress to Policy and Resources Committee. There have been some changes made to these policies since Local Plan Sub-Committee and these changes will be set out in the coming paragraphs.

### Biodiversity

4.3 Biodiversity is an integral part of the character of Three Rivers and contributes to the high quality of life in the area. The District supports a variety of wildlife in habitats as diverse as wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, orchards, heathlands and urban gardens. Conserving and enhancing the diversity of wildlife and habitats in Three Rivers forms part of the Council's strategic objectives.

4.4 National policy states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity. The National Planning Policy Framework requires local authorities to identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks; and promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of important habitats and species. Further, it requires that appropriate weight is given not only to protected sites but also to protected features of biodiversity and geological interest in the wider environment.

4.5 The policy is split into two sections. The first section of the policy relates to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The Environment Act 2021 requires that all

applicable development shall deliver a net gain of at least 10% against the ecological baseline. Net gain is measured using DEFRA's Statutory Biodiversity Metric, which quantifies the value of biodiversity in terms of the habitats present and those proposed to be created and/or enhanced. The policy sets out that BNG should be delivered using a biodiversity gain hierarchy and that BNG will be secured for a period of at least 30 years via planning conditions, legal agreements and conservation covenants as appropriate. It must be noted that BNG is a legal requirement for relevant development as set out in Environment Act 2021 and as such is not necessarily required to form part of Local Plan Policy. However, it is considered appropriate to include BNG within the wider biodiversity policy to clarify what the Council expects with regards to BNG.

- 4.6 The second section of the policy relates to the protection and enhancement of existing biodiversity and references the hierarchy of protected sites, the protection of such sites, that proposals should further the aims of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and that proposals should seek to conserve, restore and enhance protected species not addressed by net gain and reduce fragmentation by enhancing the connectivity of their populations and supporting habitats, and promote the functionality of other green infrastructure.
- 4.7 Since agreement at Local Plan Sub-Committee the following changes have been made to the policy. In policy paragraph 3 reference to biodiversity gain plans was strengthened. In policy paragraph 7 the word 'public' was added before benefits. In policy paragraph 8 the word 'specific' was added before location and the word 'clearly' was added before outweighs. Reference to ecological survey and assessments was added to policy paragraph 12. Reference to blue infrastructure was added to the reasoned justification.

#### Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

- 4.8 Dacorum Borough Council commissioned visitor surveys at the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC as part of their Local Plan preparation. The footprint Ecology Report found that the site is being heavily damaged by visitor pressure and identified concerns around the cumulative impact of residential development.
- 4.9 The report identified a 12.6km Zone of Influence (ZOI). As a result, large developments in the ZOI will be required to produce a Habitat Regulations Assessment and may be required to provide mitigation measures.
- 4.10 Although part of Three Rivers falls within the ZOI it was not included in the 'strategic solution' by Natural England as less than 2% of visitors to the SAC were from Three Rivers.
- 4.11 Natural England responded to our Regulation 18 Additional Sites for Potential Allocation consultation. A key mitigation measure they require is the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). Any SANG would need to be sufficient size/quality to divert visitors away from the Chiltern Beechwoods and create a semi-natural experience. SANGs must have the following:
- Adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use (within 400m walk of developments linked to it).



- Possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3 to 2.5km around the SANG.
  - SANG must be designed so that they are perceived as safe by users; they must not have tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking routes.
  - Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid an urban feel.
  - SANG must be semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures.
- 4.12 The draft Chiltern Beechwoods SAC policy has been prepared in consultation with Natural England who are satisfied with the wording provided. Only minor changes have been made to the policy since it was reported to the Local Plan Sub-Committee to simplify paragraph one and make it clearer.

#### Northwood Headquarters (MOD)

- 4.13 National Planning Policy (NPPF 2024 paragraph 102b) requires planning policies to take into account defence requirements by recognising and supporting development required for operational defence and security purposes and ensuring that operational sites are not affected adversely by the impact of other development proposed in the area.
- 4.14 Following a representation from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (MOD) on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence a new policy was proposed in relation to the MOD Northwood Site which they identify as a significant defence asset where additional development is envisaged to support National Security needs.
- 4.15 Therefore, a new policy was proposed to meet national planning policy guidance, to support operational development of the site, to ensure that development proposals in proximity of the MOD Northwood site will not lead to the need for mitigation from MOD activities and also recognising the MOD's commitment to reduce its built estate in the future which may result in brownfield sites becoming available.

#### Net Zero Policies

- 4.16 Net zero carbon local plan policies are needed due to the Council's carbon reduction commitments. This is to become a carbon neutral district by 2045 and to reduce emissions in the district by 14% annually from 2023 to 2027.
- 4.17 Methods to reach these commitments include encouraging developers to adapt net zero standards, as well as, requiring BREEAM 'Excellent' minimum standards in major non-residential developments, implementing a decarbonisation action plan for residential properties and support residents and businesses to reduce their energy use and improve the efficiency of their homes and buildings.
- 4.18 However, there are gaps in national regulation in achieving net zero emissions. Current building regulations do not deliver net zero carbon buildings or low-



enough space heat demand (not even the Future Homes Standard). The government's net zero strategy has been found unlawfully insufficient.

- 4.19 The Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) in December 2023 states *“Planning policies that propose local energy efficiency standards that go beyond current or planned building regulations should be rejected at examination if they do not have a well-reasoned and robustly costed rationale that ensures:*

- *Development remains viable and impact on housing supply and affordability is considered in accordance with the NPPF*
- *Additional requirement is expressed as a percentage uplift of a dwelling's Target Emissions Rate (TER) calculated using a specified version of the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP)*

*Where policies go beyond current/planned building regulations, policies should be applied flexibly... Where the applicant can demonstrate that meeting higher standards is not technically feasible, in relation to the appropriate local energy infrastructure and access to adequate supply chains.”*

- 4.20 Inspectors will expect local policy to be consistent with the WMS (as per NPPF tests of soundness). This means that the policies are designed around percentage improvements on building regulations metrics and use a percentage improvement on SAP/SBEM. The Passivhaus Planning Package (PHPP) is also used for those applicants who are using more accurate methods of calculation.
- 4.21 These policies were prepared in conjunction with external consultants that are experts in this field. Following these policies being reported to the Local Plan Sub-Committee, officers have worked together with the external consultants to address member concerns, and a further review by officers and the consultants to improve clarity and implementation has resulted in the subsequent changes.
- 4.22 The changes mainly relate to policies XA- Net Zero Operational Carbon in New Build Residential Development, XB- Net Zero Operational Carbon in non-residential development and XC- Climate-adapted Design and Construction.
- 4.23 In relation to policy XA, instead of including the unit price of offsetting in section A4, as this will change over time, an explanation of how it will be calculated has replaced the unit cost in the policy. The unit cost has been left in the supporting text under the Offsetting Calculation as the current cost as an example. The other main change to this policy is the Smart Energy System- section A6, that has summarised requirements to avoid repetition of A3- On-site renewable energy. In line with member concerns, we have also reduced the threshold of Post-Occupancy Evaluation (A7) monitoring of energy use and generation from 100 units to 50 units. Because policy XB mirrors elements of XA, as it is the non-residential comparable policy, changes have been made where relevant to reflect policy XA.
- 4.24 The changes in policy XC are mainly related to the concerns of capturing all, or a greater range of development, and stipulating some elements would require compliance i.e. 'must' rather than 'should'. Subsequently, the changes are minor in wording, but run through the policy. For example, C3-Cooling Hierarchy, has become **All** development **must** show how designs have optimised the internal and solar heat gains balance...instead of **New** development **should** show how designs have optimised the internal and solar heat gains balance....

- 4.25 Policies XD 'Embodied Carbon and Minimising Waste' and XE 'Reducing Carbon Emissions in Existing Buildings' have had more limited amendments, but XD lowers the threshold of limiting embodied carbon in line with industry standards, from 100 to 50 dwellings. Also, there was an error in D5 Embodied Carbon in Non-Major Development where 'less than' has been changed to 'more than' regarding non-residential floorspace, to be consistent with the rest of the paragraph. XE only amends 'house' to 'whole building' to reflect a wider definition when upgrading historic buildings, in section E3 'Adapting Heritage Assets to Climate Change.'

## **5 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

- 5.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

## **6 Financial, Legal, Staffing, Equal Opportunities, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications**

None specific.

## **7 Financial Implications**

None specific.

## **8 Legal Implications**

- 8.1 None specific.


## **9 Risk and Health & Safety Implications**

- 9.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.
- 9.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Planning Policy and Conservation service plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this plan.

<b>Nature of Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Suggested Control Measures</b>	<b>Response (tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</b>	<b>Risk Rating (combination of likelihood and impact)</b>
Failure/Delay in delivering Local Plan	Increase in speculative planning applications	Local Development Scheme	tolerate	6
Local Plan found 'unsound' at examination	Main modifications may be required which will result	Ensure that the Local Plan is evidenced based and	tolerate	6

	in an extended examination and costs and/or the Plan may have to be withdrawn.	justified		
--	--	-----------	--	--

- 9.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

<b>Very Likely</b>  <b>Likelihood</b> <b>Remote</b>	<b>Low</b> <b>4</b>	<b>High</b> <b>8</b>	<b>Very High</b> <b>12</b>	<b>Very High</b> <b>16</b>
	<b>Low</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Medium</b> <b>6</b>	<b>High</b> <b>9</b>	<b>Very High</b> <b>12</b>
	<b>Low</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Low</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Medium</b> <b>6</b>	<b>High</b> <b>8</b>
	<b>Low</b> <b>1</b>	<b>Low</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Low</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Low</b> <b>4</b>
<b>Impact</b> <b>Low</b> -----> <b>Unacceptable</b>				

#### Impact Score

4 (Catastrophic)  
3 (Critical)  
2 (Significant)  
1 (Marginal)

#### Likelihood Score

4 (Very Likely (≥80%))  
3 (Likely (21-79%))  
2 (Unlikely (6-20%))  
1 (Remote (≤5%))

- 9.4 In the officers' opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

## 10 Recommendation

### 10.1 That Full Council:

- Approves the Regulation 18 Consultation document in Appendix 1 to this report
- Grants delegated authority to the Head of Planning Policy and Conservation in consultation with the Lead Member for the Local Plan to make any minor changes that are required prior to the documents being published for consultation.

Report prepared by: Marko Kalik, Head of Planning Policy and Conservation

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Regulation 18 Document  
Appendix 2 – SHELAA forms  
Appendix 3 – Draft Sustainability Appraisal Briefing note  
Appendix 4 – Access to Services information

## **Background Papers**

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)  
Planning Practice Guidance  
Core Strategy (2011)  
Green Belt Review Strategic Analysis (Stage 1) (2017)  
Stage 2 Green Belt Assessment (2019)  
Regulation 18 Part 1: Preferred Policy Options (2021)  
Regulation 18 Part 2: Sites for Potential Allocation (2021)  
Regulation 18 Part 3: Additional Sites for Potential Allocation (2023)  
Regulation 18 Part 4: Lower Housing Growth Option (2023)  
Potential Sites consultation (2018)  
Regulation 18 Issues & Options consultation (2017)  
Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy (2022)  
Strategic Housing & Employment Land Availability Assessment (2020)  
Strategic Housing & Employment Land Availability Assessment Addendum (2023)  
Urban Capacity Study (2020)

